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HEADLINE: Kurjiaka proposes prison commission

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BODY:

The head of the American Civil Liberties Union in Arkansas Sunday suggested an independent prison commission, similar to the Arkansas Highway Commission, to guard against inmate abuse in state prisons.

Sandra Kurjiaka of Little Rock said in a radio interview that politics should be removed from the state Correction Department, and the process of allowing the prison to police itself be turned over to an outside agency.

"I think we really need that, and we need that not only for the prisons," Ms Kurjiaka told station KLAZ in Little Rock. "We need that for the jails.

"There's tremendous abuse of people who end up incarcerated in Arkansas and it's very unfortunate that there are a lot of jails where people are badly abused."

Ms. Kurjiaka called the system of self-regulation in the prison system "the fox in the hen house."

"You need someone who's outside of the system to come in and take a look at what happened and to report on that in some sort of a real objective way," she said.

Ms. Kurjiaka said that many grievances filed by inmates might have been intercepted by guards, keeping them away from prison officials.

The ACLU director called the proposed Unborn Child Amendment to the state Constitution an attempt to hurting crime victims. She said a rape victim in Arkansas can get an abortion if the rape was reported immediately and if the victim can find a doctor to perform it without pay.

"We do not fund abortions for rape victims. We do not fund abortions for victims of incest... This is an amendment to say that the state may never do so. Never in the future can these victims of violent crimes be helped by the state of Arkansas," she said.

Ms. Kurjaka said the ballot title of the amendment is deceptive and may be challenged by the ACLU.

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